

Jacob

HEBREW PATRIARCH

Alternative Titles: Isrāʾīl, Israel, Yaʿaqov, Yaʿqūb, Yisraʾel

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Jacob

HEBREW PATRIARCH

FAMILY

Spouse Rachel

Spouse Leah

Father Isaac

Son Joseph

Brother Esau

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CATEGORIES

Judaism

Jacob, Hebrew Yaʿaqov, Arabic Yaʿqūb, also called Israel, Hebrew Yisraʾel, Arabic Isrāʾīl, Hebrew patriarch who was the grandson of Abraham, the son of Isaac and Rebekah, and the traditional ancestor of the people of Israel. Stories about Jacob in the Bible begin at Genesis 25:19.

According to the Old Testament, Jacob was the younger twin brother of Esau, who was the ancestor of Edom and the Edomites. The two are representatives of two different grades of social order, Jacob being a pastoralist and Esau a nomadic hunter. During her pregnancy, Rebekah was told by God that she would give birth to twins; each of them would found a great nation, and Esau, the elder, would serve his younger brother. As it turned out, Jacob, by means of an elaborate double deception, managed to obtain his older brother's birthright from their father. Jacob then fled his brother's wrath and went to take refuge with the Aramaean tribe of his ancestors at Haran in Mesopotamia.

Along his journey Jacob received a special revelation from God; God promised Jacob lands and numerous offspring that would prove to be the blessing of the entire Earth. Jacob named the place where he received his vision Bethel ("House of God"). Arriving at his uncle Laban's home in Haran, Jacob fell in love with his cousin Rachel. He worked for her father, Laban, for seven years to obtain Rachel's hand in marriage, but then Laban substituted his older daughter, Leah, for Rachel at the wedding ceremony. Unwittingly married to Leah, Jacob was thus compelled to serve Laban for another seven years so that he could take his beloved Rachel as his wife as well. Jacob then served Laban for another six years, during which he amassed a large amount of property; he then set out with his wives and children to return to Palestine. On the way Jacob wrestled with a mysterious stranger, a divine being, who changed Jacob's name to Israel. Jacob then met and was reconciled with Esau and settled in Canaan.

## ADVERTISEMENT

Jacob had 13 children, 10 of whom were founders of tribes of Israel. Leah bore him his only daughter, Dinah, and six sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi (who did not found a tribe, but was the ancestor of the Levites), Judah (from whom a tribe and the Davidic monarchy were descended), Issachar, and Zebulun. Leah's maidservant, Zilpah, bore him Gad and Asher, and Rachel's maidservant, Bilhah, bore him Dan and Naphtali. Rachel's sons were Benjamin and Joseph (who did not found a tribe, but whose sons founded the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim).

The story of Jacob's later years more properly belongs to the story of Joseph (q.v.). Late in his life, a famine prompted Jacob and his sons to migrate to Egypt, where he was reunited with his son Joseph, who had disappeared some years before. Israel died in Egypt at the age of 147 years and was buried in Canaan at Hebron.

The stories about Jacob's birth and his acquisition of the birthright (Genesis 25:19–34; 27) provide a thinly veiled apology for the relation between Edom (Esau) and Israel in Davidic times. Edom, the older nation, was made subject to Israel by David (2 Samuel 8:8ff.). The Jacob stories assume and emphasize that all things occur by divine design. The divine objective is of overriding significance; it is God's will that Esau (Edom) shall live in the desert and be subject to

Israel.

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